

Minutes of the Ashland Budget Committee Meeting  
Held on December 30, 2004  
In the  
Ashland Fire Department Conference Room

Committee Members Present: D. Ruell, Chair, N. Bavis, S. Coleman, G. Dion, R. Fisk, D. Golden, J. Goss, J. Hughes, K.B. Hughes, K.L. Hughes, H. Knowlton and A.M. Reeve

Committee Members Excused: J. Coles, D. Sullivan

Others Present: Alice Staples, Jim Gleick, Linda Pack, Sara Weinberg, Brad Ober, Thomas Stewart

6:00 p.m. the meeting was called to order.

Mr. Stewart described the current fire department vehicles and led a tour of the vehicles. Mr. Ober presented the fire department's proposed expenditures which will be presented to the voters in a warrant article. Proposed expenditures total \$503,000 and include \$3,000 for body work for the ambulance, \$30,000 for body work and rear springs for the 1987 Mack engine, \$15,000 for body work for the 1995 engine and approximately \$450,000 to replace the ladder truck. The fire department proposes to raise the \$503,000 using a 7 year bond which it anticipates costing approximately \$85,000 per year.

Mr. Ober responded to questions concerning the replacement ladder truck, noting that ladder trucks are helpful for more than 3+ story buildings. He stated they are useful to avoid roof damage, to reduce risk to firefighters and are better suited for fighting fires between closely spaced buildings.

Members of the committee voiced concern over the fact that the current ladder truck has not been operational since 2001 and whether the town can afford the proposed \$503,000 package. Concern was also expressed that increased equipment capability would lead to increased expense responding to calls from other towns. Members of the committee questioned which other towns had ladder trucks, and for those without them, why not. They were told that Meredith has raised funds for a ladder truck. Representatives of the fire department said that Bristol had a capital reserve account and was trying to replace its ambulance and ladder. New Hampton was said to have a reserve fund to replace its ambulance. In addition, they said that Ashland has relied on Plymouth's ladder truck since 2001 and no longer wants to wait for Plymouth to respond. A member of the budget committee asked if those owning / building buildings most in need of a ladder truck could be assessed a users' fee and was told this was possible if the Master Plan supported it, but the Selectmen were not likely to want users fees because it might deter new business from moving to town. Members of the fire department said that the most viable truck was a "Quint" that operated with fewer staff and that they had found a truck used by its manufacturer for demos. They said that the number of volunteers available for day call outs had dropped so that a machine that required fewer firemen was called for. The representatives also said that grants for aerial equipment were infrequent.

Mr. Gleick presented two clarifications to the budget for the Parks and Recreation Department. He said that the arrangement with the laundry machine company paid the town 50% of income received in any machine in excess of \$250 per month. The vendor supplies and maintains the machines, including insuring them, at no cost to the town. The expense for water and power needed to operate the machines was said to be nominal.

Also, the budget had included \$1,500 for campground salaries. Last year, all 23 sites were rented and the campground did not have a manager to monitor the restrooms. If someone were responsible for cleaning the restrooms, the campground could qualify for accreditation. He anticipated this would require 1 hour / day, 7 days / week.

Alice Staples presented the budget for the library. Notable items include:

Budget Line	Explanation
01-4550-10-610	The library wants to offer health insurance to the library director. This was presented as a request because the library director is not a full time position. The library is open fewer than the 32 hours required for a full time position. Some budget committee members express concern with offering benefits to some part time employees, but not others. The director currently works 30 hours.

Members of the Committee questioned the source of the funds used to buy new air conditioners. The library foundation raised \$750 last year and this income was included in the Annual Town Report. Concerns were expressed with a lack of information on the library's spending and why each year the total budget spent was exactly equal to the total budget available. Ms. Staples said that she would provide year-to-date spending information.

Linda Pack presented the budget for the Water and Sewer Department. Notable items include:

Budget Line	Explanation
Water 6030	Administrative Fee: This amount includes a portion of the town treasurer expense.
Water 6230	Contract Operations: Costs are derived from 5 year agreement with Aquarian.
Water 6280	Depreciation: The budget line for this item was decreased by \$10,000 but the actual amount was estimated to be "far less". This number was cut to avoid raising rates. When asked what major expenditures were anticipated, she said they were expecting general repairs.
Water 6630	Mains & Manholes: The budget for '05 was \$10,000 compared to \$1 for '04 because '04 spending was \$38,550.00 for repairs.
Water & Sewer 6840	Payroll: increased by 3.5% same as the town.
Water & Sewer 6090	Audit: Ms. Pack said that a town auditor will accept the separate water

	and sewer audit. She promised to provide information on why the budget for the water audit was \$2,500 while the budget for the sewer audit was \$1,350.
Sewer 6410	Fuel: \$1 was budgeted for 2005 but \$600.61 was spent for 04. Ms. Pack said this cost was to fuel a generator, needed to respond to a freeze up last winter.

Ms. Pack responded to questions from the Budget Committee, including saying that no major expansion or replacement projects are planned. She said that the Department was considering increasing rates to be able to complete some projects such as coordinating with the highway department on the timing of Hill Street repairs. She said that many repair and improvement projects were stalled because the lack of a town administrator delayed pursuing other funding sources, such as grants to complete these projects.

Mr. Ruell commented that Mr. Alpers and Mr. Nichols were expected to attend. In their absence, members of the committee submitted questions to Mr. Ruell on portions of the budget already presented that, they felt, needed greater clarification.

Ms. Reeve moved to adjourn. Mr. Bavis seconded. The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm.